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BACK TO SCHOOL BRINGS POTENTIAL FOR POISONINGS AND EXPOSURES: EXPERTS ARE AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO PREVENT AND MANAGE A POISONING OR EXPOSURE

OKLAHOMA CITY – Summer break is quickly coming to an end and it's time for a new school year to begin. New routines can mean new distractions, which can result in poisoning and exposures both at home and in the classroom. During the 2022-2023 school year, the Oklahoma Poison Center managed approximately 370 cases related to students who were exposed to a variety of products or substances while at school or daycare.

“Students will always have mishaps with pens, glue, or art supplies that shouldn’t be put in the mouth or eyes, we encourage all teachers and school staff to have the Poison Helpline number in their phone in the event of one of these accidents. The Oklahoma Poison Center would like to remind teachers and parents that items such as energy drinks, hand sanitizer, common classroom supplies, and prescription medications can pose a threat to children if they are not used properly” says Kristie Edelen, managing director of the Oklahoma Poison Center.

Energy drinks have gained popularity in recent years among children and adolescents. Unfortunately, most of them are not aware of the large amount of caffeine and other stimulants such as guarana and panax ginseng present in these drinks. Many of these drinks contain more caffeine than a large cup of coffee. Children who consume too much caffeine and stimulants can have symptoms including tremor, increased heart rate, sweating, stomach upset and vomiting. Very large amounts of caffeine and stimulants can cause seizures and abnormal heart rhythms.

Another potentially toxic substance widely available in the classroom is hand sanitizer. Some children will drink these alcohol-containing fluids leading to intoxication, stomach upset, vomiting, and even significant drowsiness that could lead to coma. While younger children may accidentally swallow hand sanitizer, older children and adolescents commonly ingest hand sanitizer to get intoxicated. Parents and teachers are reminded to keep hand sanitizer up and out of reach of young children and only allow small amounts to be utilized at one time in older children and teens.

Exposures to classroom supplies are common, and often concerned parents and teachers call the poison center because their small child has eaten a portion of a “lead” pencil. “Pencils are primarily graphite and pose little to no health concern. They can, however, potentially be a choking hazard or cause blockage in small children if they are swallowed” says Kristie Edelen, managing director of the Oklahoma

Poison Center. Commonly sprayed office supplies such as keyboard duster as well as glues and rubber cement can be accidentally inhaled or intentionally abused. Abuse of these inhalants can lead to intoxication as well as very serious symptoms such as seizures and abnormal heart rhythms.

Mornings can be chaotic, especially when you are settling back into a routine. At home and at school, medication safety is important for children of all ages. If your child is going to receive medication at school, be sure to provide a list of all medications with dosage instructions and stick with a consistent schedule to avoid double dosing. In older children and teenagers in middle and high schools, experimentation with medications can lead to toxic exposures. It is not uncommon for adolescents to “sample” classmates’ home prescription medications or marijuana-containing products with potentially dangerous results. This time of year, as kids are catching back up with friends in school and at social events, is a perfect time to reinforce the risks of taking someone else’s medications. At the same time, we remind parents and teachers to lock up and monitor their prescription medications in the home and classroom.

In addition, The Oklahoma Poison Center would like to offer these medication safety tips:

- Be sure to read and follow medicine labels for every dose.
- Use the dosing device if one comes with the medication.
- Do not take multiple medicines with the same active ingredient.
- Keep medicines in their original containers.
- Check expiration dates on medications.
- Store all medications up, away, and out of sight from young children.
- Talk with children about only taking medication with permission/guidance from a parent or trusted adult.
- Talk with teens about only taking the recommended amount of their medications and about medication abuse and misuse.

Pharmacists and registered nurses at the poison center are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week at (800) 222-1222. Please do not email the poison center or a member of the poison center staff, as poisoning emergencies are not handled through email. The Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information is a program of the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy at the OU Health Sciences Center. For more information, log on to www.oklahomapoison.org.

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